

Experienced AU ski teams look for return to national championships

1/26/01

ALFRED First-year AU Alpine ski coach Kevin Walsh has high hopes for the men's and women's teams in 2001. He is optimistic both squads will return to the national championships as a wealth of experienced skiers are back from last season. The men's and women's teams each competed at regionals last year at Mountain Creek in Vernon Valley, NJ, and moved onto the United States Collegiate Ski Association championships at Loon Mountain, NH. With neither squad losing skiers to graduation, both are poised to defend their regional titles and move on to nationals. The men's team is particularly strong, with all five top skiers returning from a squad that was second at regionals and 17th at nationals. They include juniors Tylan Calcagni (Yarmouth, ME/Gould Academy) and Conor Walsh (Mt. Morris/Mt. Morris), the top giant slalom and slalom skiers, respectively, from last season. Calcagni had four first-place finishes during the regular season last year, all in giant slalom, to go with two second places in slalom. He finished eighth in the giant slalom at regionals and 46th at nationals. Walsh had three first place finishes in 2000 (two in slalom and one in giant slalom) and a pair of seconds (one each in slalom and giant slalom). He was fifth in the slalom at regionals and 77th at nationals. Other returnees from last year's team include junior Cody Washburn (Deer River/Carthage), sophomore Connor Kell (Ellicottville/Ellicottville) and senior Mike Koeppel (Galeton, PA/Galeton). Kell had five top-10 finishes during the regular season and came in eighth in the slalom at regionals. He was the team's top performer at nationals, taking 41st in the slalom. Washburn logged seven top-10 finishes in 2000 and was 10th in the giant slalom at regionals. Koeppel will be seeking his third trip to the national championships. He competed at nationals last year and also as a freshman in 1998. He had three top-10 finishes last year. "I have trained with this team for the past two seasons," said Walsh, who is Conor Walsh's father. "What I see so far is a fine-tuned team. I expect them to go into the season with a winning attitude." As for the team's chances of returning to nationals, Walsh said he's taking nothing for granted, despite the return of the entire team from 2000. "With hard work at every meet this season, the men can produce the same results as last season and I fully expect a repeat trip to nationals this year." The outlook for the women's team is optimistic as well. All five skiers from last year's team - which won regionals and was 13th at national plus two new recruits, make up this year's squad. "I believe this year's women's team is the strongest ever at AU," Walsh commented. That's saying a lot, given the fact the women's team has gone to nationals the last three seasons. "I have five girls that can score top 10 finishes each week." Team leaders will be seniors Charity Lord (Bath/Haverling) and Jen Titus (Honeoye Falls/Honeoye Falls-Lima). Lord is strong in the giant slalom, although she did log three top-10 finishes in the slalom to go with four in the giant slalom during the 2000 regular season. She finished eighth in the giant slalom and sixth in the slalom at last year's regionals and 36th in the giant slalom at nationals. Titus is the team's most consistent performer, finishing in the top 10 in all but one regular season event last season. She was ninth in the slalom at regionals and 62nd in the giant slalom at nationals. Junior Becky Van Overbake (Mt. Morris/Morris) is another top returnee. She had four third-place finishes and two seconds last regular season. Her second place in the giant slalom was the team's best performance at regionals. She came in 45th in giant slalom at nationals. Rounding out the top five are sophomore Christian Botens (Cuba/Cuba-Rushford) and freshman Kelly Farrell (Meriden, NH/Kimball Union Academy). "Kelly skied her way onto the team in preseason tryouts," Walsh said, noting her first-place finishes in both the slalom and giant slalom during tryouts. "Chrissy will be strong in giant slalom and slalom this year." To make room for Botens and Farrell on the varsity roster, Walsh moved sophomore Kirsten Holmes (Cobleskill/Cobleskill-Richmondville) and junior Michelle Cole (Gloversville/Gloversville) to the junior varsity. Both competed on varsity last season, with Holmes garnering five top-10 finishes during the regular season and Cole grabbing four to go with a seventh-place finish in the slalom at regionals. The women's team has enjoyed success without a standout performer. Last year, the team won regionals and moved on to nationals, despite no individual first place finishes by its skiers. But with each skier consistently raking in top-five finishes, the squad was strong and, Walsh hopes, will be again this year. "I fully expect the girls to work as a team throughout the season and take on all other teams in the conference," said Walsh. "I believe working as a team, the girls will make another appearance at regionals and move on to nationals again this year."